
An Evaluation of the Sentence Repetition Task of TELD-3:T with Turkish-German Bilingual Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI)

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Abstract

Specific Language Impairment (SLI) is defined as a deficit in the development of language with no evidence of hearing loss, mental retardation or autism. Given these exclusionary criteria, monolingual children who score more than 1.25 SD below normative means in two linguistic domains on a standardized language measure are considered to be children with SLI (Leonard 1998).

Since SLI as genuine language impairment affects both languages in bilinguals, it should be therefore ideally assessed in both of the L1 and L2. There is a plethora of research on SLI focusing on Indo-European languages; however, research on languages belonging to other language families, such as Turkish and Arabic remains relatively scarce. This affects not only linguistic research, but has also clinical consequences due to the lack of knowledge and assessment tools for the diagnosis of SLI in migrant children. A practical proposal has been to use monolingual standardized tools but to adjust the z-scores based on language dominance in bilingual children (i.e. -1.5 to -2.25; cf. Thordardottir 2012).

Furthermore, the linguistic markers used to diagnose SLI in clinical setting may coincide with the characteristics of language change in migrant settings. Research on monolingual SLI in Turkish suggests that errors in complex sentences with a subordinate clause may be a potential clinical marker of SLI (Topbaş 2010). The acquisition of complement and relative clauses as well as participial constructions occurs in monolingual Turkish children at around age five (Aksu-Koç 1994) whereas Turkish-German bilingual children prefer finite clauses at the age of 4-9 instead of subordination (Herkenrath & Karakoç 2002). These might misleadingly be interpreted as characteristics of SLI in Turkish migrant children. Thereupon, a sole adjustment of z-scores using tools for the assessment of monolinguals might be inappropriate for Immigrant Turkish children. Furthermore, sentence repetition tasks (SRTs), accepted as a reliable method for identifying monolingual children with SLI may not distinguish between typically developing bilingual Turkish-German children (BI-TD) and bilingual children with SLI (BI-SLI).

The present study addresses the possibilities and limitations of adapting a monolingual assessment tool for Standard Turkish (TELD-3-:T), Topbaş & G'üven 2007) to the bilingual migrant setting, comparing the data of 5 Turkish-German BI-TD (age range: 5;1- 7;5) and 5

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BI-SLI children (age range 5;6- 6;6) by TELD-3. The preliminary results show no significant differences in the L1 performance of BI-TD and Bi-SLI ($\chi^2(1) = 0,476, p = 0.490$), but even converse results to the diagnosis. Moreover, the coordinate clause (cf. Example 1) illustrates that counting only correctly repeated sentences does not differentiate SLI in the context of immigrant Turkish through TELD-3:T. Accordingly, even with the recommended z-score adaptation, an L1-assessment with such a task for standard Turkish could be inappropriate. Contrasting the linguistic markers of SLI to the linguistic features of migrant Turkish regarding TELD-3: T, the outcome of grammatical SLI in Turkish-German bilingual children and suggestions for assessment in the migration setting will be presented and discussed.

Example 1

Coordinate Clause

Standard Turkish Çocuklar camı kirip kaçtılar.

Child-P window-ACC break-GER run away-PAST-3P

"Having broken the window, children run away."

***TD14HT 6;9** Çocuklar camı kirdilar, gittiler.

Child-P window-ACC break-PAST-3P go-PAST-3P

"Children broke the window, went."

Immigrant Turkish Çocuklar camı kirdi, gitti.

Child-P window-ACC-2P-PAST, go-2P-PAST

"Children broke the window, went".

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